

**Congressional Fire Services Institute / Fire Apparatus Manufacturers' Association /
Fire and Emergency Manufacturers and Services Association / International Association of Arson Investigators /
International Association of Fire Chiefs / International Association of Fire Fighters /
International Fire Service Training Association / International Society of Fire Service Instructors /
National Association of State Fire Marshals / National Fire Protection Association /
National Volunteer Fire Council / North American Fire Training Directors**

Outside Witness Testimony: Submitted to the Subcommittee on Homeland Security

Regarding: Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) programs – Firefighter assistance grants, United States Fire Administration, Urban Search and Rescue System

March 28, 2014

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
H-307, The Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Carter
Chair, House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Homeland Security
B-307 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Price
Ranking Member, House Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
2162 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Rogers, Lowey, Carter and Price:

On behalf of the nation's fire and emergency services, we write to urge your continued support for critical programs that enhance our nation's readiness: the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (FIRE) Program and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant Program, the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) and the Urban Search and Rescue Response Program (US&R).

The FIRE and SAFER grant programs are imperative to addressing the needs of more than one million fire and emergency services personnel, while providing an economic stimulus to American businesses. As you begin work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 appropriations process, we encourage you to fund these programs at \$680 million evenly divided between the two programs, the same level the Congress approved for these programs in FY 2014.

Congress created FIRE and SAFER to address the baseline needs of our nation's fire and emergency services. These two highly successful programs help ensure that our nation's 30,000 fire departments have the necessary training, equipment, and staffing to respond to over 30 million emergency calls annually and continue to work to reduce community risk. Every community across the country relies on our firefighters to respond to a variety of emergency situations, including structure fires, emergency medical services, hazardous materials response, technical rescue, and wildland/urban interface fires. Both the FIRE and SAFER grant programs improve the response capabilities in every one of those emergency response areas, and provide funding for crucial fire prevention and safety programs targeted toward high-risk populations.

The FIRE and SAFER programs have been extremely effective. According to the Third Needs Assessment of the U.S Fire Service, published by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), significant progress has been made in the readiness of fire departments across the country since the creation of the FIRE and SAFER programs. The NFPA study found:

- 51% of all fire departments lack enough portable radios to equip all responders on a shift (down from 77% in 2001);
- 51% of all fire departments cannot equip all firefighters on a shift with self-contained breathing apparatus (down from 70% in 2001);
- 46% of all fire departments have not formally trained all their personnel involved in structural firefighting (down from 55% in 2001);
- 48% of all fire departments responsible for emergency medical service (EMS) have not formally trained all their personnel (down from 54% in 2001);
- 20% of fire departments protecting populations of at least 500,000 have fewer than four firefighters assigned to an engine (down from 30% in 2001);
- 26% of departments protecting populations between 250,000 and 499,999 have fewer than four firefighters assigned to an engine (down from 41% in 2001).
- 35% of departments do not provide a school fire safety education program based on a national model curriculum (down from 47% in 2001).
- 52% of departments do not provide a free smoke alarm distribution program (down from 69% in 2001).

Summarizing the report, NFPA stated, “In all areas emphasized by the [FIRE] and SAFER grants, there is ample evidence of impact from the grants **but also considerable residual need still to be addressed**, even for needs that have seen considerable need reduction in the past decade.”

As the nation’s economic challenges continue, local fire departments – both career and volunteer – are forced to cut services and staffing, placing local communities at greater risk. In addition, departments are forced to postpone purchasing equipment, apparatus, and training and education programs that would otherwise enhance capabilities by bringing their departments into compliance with national voluntary consensus standards. The FIRE and SAFER grant programs provide the means to enhance preparedness and response capabilities nationwide to all types of hazards. These capabilities are squarely in the federal interest and justify continued federal investments.

In recent appropriations, Congress has authorized the Federal Emergency Management Agency to use funds from its “Salaries and Expenses” account to cover costs for administering the FIRE and SAFER grants. In previous years, a percentage of the appropriated funds for the grant programs were designated for such costs. Our organizations support the change Congress made in the Fiscal Year 2013 and 2014 funding bill and ask that Congress continue this practice for Fiscal Year 2015, allowing the full extent of grant dollars possible to be awarded to eligible fire departments.

Another issue we bring to your attention is funding for the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA). USFA plays an important role at the national level, ensuring that the fire service is prepared to respond to all

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hazards. Each year, USFA provides training to approximately one million fire and emergency service personnel through the National Fire Academy (NFA). It also collects important data and conducts research to reduce the threat of fire and other dangers in local communities. Unfortunately, over the past decade, USFA's budget has been reduced by 25% percent. This trend needs to stop. Continued cuts to USFA's budget will prevent improvements to the infrastructure of the NFA, eliminate important programs that promote fire safety and fire prevention in the wildland urban interface, and reduce technical support for the National Fire Incident Reporting System. For Fiscal Year 2014, Congress funded USFA at \$44 million. We ask that Congress continue to appropriate \$44 million for the USFA for FY 2015.

Lastly, we request your support for the Urban Search and Rescue Response System (US&R). As the nation's only self-sufficient, all-hazards, ready-response force, US&R is essential to our nation's homeland security. Given its crucial importance, we are extremely concerned with recent cuts to the program.

The average cost to maintain a US&R team exceeds \$2 million. Although Congress funded US&R at \$35.18 million in FY 2013 and FY 2014, this amount only covers a portion of the necessary costs, leaving local governments responsible for filling the gap and, thus, impairing local public safety. The FY 2015 budget request would cut funding for each US&R task force by about \$350,000, which puts an additional burden on local governments for a national asset. At a minimum, we urge Congress to fund the program at this level; however, we strongly support full funding so that US&R can carry out its mission safely and effectively.

We remain grateful for your continued leadership in ensuring that America's fire and emergency services are prepared to protect the public from all hazards – both natural and manmade. As you continue developing legislation to fund these programs for FY 2015, we urge you to consider our recommendations to ensure that our nation's first responders can continue to protect and serve their communities safely and effectively.

Sincerely,

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